

The University of Chicago

THE HUMAN-INTEREST STORY:
A STUDY OF POPULAR
LITERATURE

A PART OF A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE DIVISION OF THE
SOCIAL SCIENCES IN CANDIDACY FOR
THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY

1937

By
HELEN MacGILL HUGHES

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THE LINDBERGH CASE: A STUDY OF HUMAN INTEREST AND POLITICS

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ABSTRACT

The American newspaperman's view of the Lindbergh case as "the greatest human-interest story of the decade" is rooted in a conception of the newspaper as something to interest everyone. But in the Berlin press of 1932 it was reported in four forms, corresponding to four different types of journal: the sermon, i.e., the propagandizing accounts printed in the uncompromising communist organ; the bulletin, i.e., the concise factual reports in the organs of less doctrinaire parties and in the voluntary press of opinion, which formulated the event as news of interest to citizens and men of affairs only as a practical problem in crime-detection; the human-interest story, which disclosed the personal experience of the participants in the news and made it comprehensible to every reader as a person; and, finally, the thriller, a form designed for sale among the numerous diversion-seeking public of the boulevards. The form of the news was thus determined by the newspaper's conception of its rôle in the daily lives of its readers. Human interest does not lie in the intrinsic nature of an event; it depends upon a relation between journal and reader.

In making news into stories to be read as popular literature the American newspaper has grown more and more like the magazines, the movies, and the radio broadcasts, which have been vehicles of mass entertainment from the beginning. But the English and American newspaper began as an adjunct of parliamentary government.

FROM POLITICAL NEWS TO HUMAN INTEREST

In the eighteenth century English journalists fought for the privilege of hearing and reporting the proceedings of Parliament.¹ The right to make public business public was eventually conceded because it was conceived to be in the people's interests. The press thus assumed the rôle of defender of popular liberties, which was an expression of increasing democratic control of the state. In the thirteen colonies, at the time of the Revolutionary War, the editor established himself in the public mind as the spokesman of the governed against (or, in the case of the ill-fated Tory press, for) the governing. It is not surprising, therefore, that special concessions were awarded the newspaper to expedite its public service. The Constitution guaranteed it freedom from political interference and it was granted ex-

¹ Michael MacDonagh, *The Reporters' Gallery* (Hodder & Stoughton, 1913).

traordinary privileges in the use of the postal service. It was assumed that newspapers would use these concessions to disseminate the tidings of events of public "importance."²

They did—until James Gordon Bennett took advantage of their special position³ to get out a sheet whose purpose was his private enrichment. The newspaper was always, it is true, a private enterprise—except for the official journal, the *Congressional Record*—but it had acquired the character and obligations of a public institution: a party organ was subsidized by the party, or granted the profitable favor of public printing. But in the independent penny press which Bennett and Day pioneered, politics was ignored. Interest, not importance, became the desideratum of good "copy," because it advanced sales. In the *New York Sun* and the *New York Herald* they printed news written in the form of human-interest stories which the purchasers read as a pleasurable pastime, or, as Bennett put it,⁴ as a "broad relief . . . from the dull business air of the large morning papers." The newspaper became a vehicle of popular literature. The editor exchanged his position as a champion of the people's liberties

² In *City Editor* Stanley Walker summarizes the arguments urged by newspaper publishers, led by Colonel Robert McCormick, against the application of an NRA code to the press. This controversy depends upon two opposing views of the press: (1) as the newspaper industry, run for private profit and as much subject to regulation by the government as any other business, and (2) as a public institution, essential to democracy, and one whose inviolability, like the right of free speech and assembly, is guaranteed by the Bill of Rights. This is still the legal position of the press, but the fact that newspapers are produced now to make money for shareholders is an argument against it as an anachronism. As stated by Lippman (*Liberty and the News*) the press is granted liberty in order to perform its obligation to print the truth and the truth only, about matters of importance.

³ After the Robinson-Jewett murder, on April 10, 1836, Bennett secured the *Herald* its first great leap in circulation by writing a description of the murdered prostitute's room with a regard for detail that satisfied the curiosity of the crowds who were not allowed to see it. But he was able to do so only because editors, being supposed to be occupied with the public good, were given special treatment. He was quite frank in telling his readers so:

"I knocked at the door. A Police Officer opened it, stealthily. I told him who I was.

"'Mr. B., you can enter,'" said he with great politeness. The crowds rushed from behind seeking also an entrance.

"'No more comes in,'" said the Police Officer.

"'Why do you let that man in?'" asked one of the crowd.

"'He is an editor—he is on public duty.'"

⁴ *Herald*, May 11, 1835.

for that of a merchant engaged in producing a salable commodity. The advertiser replaced the party exchequer; he bought space to woo the attention of a body of readers which it became the editorial function to make as large as possible.

But that means that traditional privileges in news-gathering and transmitting have been used to communicate "big stories" and anecdotes to all the newspapers of the country, not for the political enlightenment but for the entertainment of their readers. The outcome of this is to make, each day, some story of a private person's luck or misfortune the "talking point" for the day, as Northcliffe used to call it, of the whole nation. Thus it comes about, as an unforeseen effect of the newspaper's early political career, that tales of the sort that the *corrido* and the ballad circulate imperfectly in primitive or provincial society, are diffused instantly, by means of a sensitive and efficient organization, throughout the country. Sometimes, indeed, they end by becoming world stories. This was what happened in the case of the Lindbergh kidnapping story, which American newspapermen call "the greatest human interest story of the decade."

THE LINDBERGH CASE AS AMERICAN NEWS

The Lindbergh story began in a report sent by police broadcast on the night of March 1, 1932:

Colonel Lindbergh's baby kidnapped from Lindbergh home in Hopewell, New Jersey, some time between 7:30 P.M. and 10:00 P.M., this date. Baby is nineteen months old and a boy. Is dressed in a sleeping suit. Request that all cars be investigated by police patrols. Authority State Police, Trenton, New Jersey.

The reception of this news caused the revaluing of all other news and the recasting of projected front pages in every newspaper office in the United States and many in Europe. It was instantly recognized as having extraordinary news value. According to *Editor and Publisher*,⁵ "with news more important because more heart-rending than any in the last decade, facing them, more than 150 reporters, photographers, motion picture men and broadcasters crowded around the Lindbergh house on that first day."

Seeing that babies die every day, what is the "importance" of a baby's death, except to the one family that is bereaved? News is

⁵ April 16, 1932, p. 5.

important to those it concerns because it relates to something that is to be done; it refers to the critical and unfinished stage of an activity. But the death of a baby under tragic circumstances is interesting to everyone, and when it is the child of a "hero" who is internationally known and admired, it is a "big story." It is not important because of calling for a redirection of action; there is nothing at all to be done. But the importance of the news, to the commercial press, lay in the universal interest it awoke. For the story that is heart-rending has human interest: everyone will read it and the newspapermen know it will increase circulation.

In the space and prominence given the news of the case, leading newspapers ranked it with major world catastrophies.⁶ On the second day, the *New York Herald-Tribune* gave the story half of page 1 and all of pages 2-8; on the day the body was found, half of page 1 and all of pages 2-6. The *New York Times* set aside a page and a quarter to print the serial numbers of the bills in which the ransom was paid. Even conservative newspapers put out extras⁷ when the body was found. Ten days after the abduction, *Editor and Publisher* commented:

Front pages assumed a more normal aspect as banner headlines disappeared from most papers and the Sino-Japanese war, the national sales-tax program and other stories reappeared in page one spots. Editorial executives attributed this to the lack of any big news break in the Lindbergh case during the week. Every city room was poised, though, ready to spread the story for all it would be worth, if the child were returned to its parents.⁸

⁶ On every day in March but one the *Herald-Tribune* gave it front-page space. The *New York Times* gave it half of page 1 and two inside pages on the first and last days. Much of this space was given to photographs, many of them telephotos, of which *Editor and Publisher* said: "They had played an important part in such headline dramas as the Sino-Japanese War, Cleveland Clinic disaster, the Colorado State Prison riot, the San Domingo hurricane, the triumphant receptions of Colonel Lindbergh in Washington and New York, national political conventions, world series baseball games, and championship prize fights. But the kidnapping of Colonel Lindbergh's son topped them all. . . . In the first eight days, 65 telephotos were sent to 170 destinations. International News Photos sent 32 shots over the wires during the first 24 hours at a cost of more than \$3,000, while the second greatest number, 10 a day, were to report the Sino-Japanese War" (March 26, 1932, p. 13). The Western Union reported that money orders cleared at Hopewell ran to nearly \$2,000 a day.

⁷ The *Berkeley Gazette* printed its first extra since President Harding had died, across the bay in San Francisco, in 1923. *Editor and Publisher*, May 21, 1932.

⁸ March 12, 1932, p. 5.

The search continued for seventy-two days, when it ended as unexpectedly and dramatically as it began in the finding of the child's body.

The effect of the news on the public was electric. Popular excitement during the ten weeks showed itself in an epidemic⁹ of talk, telephoning, letter-writing, amateur sleuthing, and newspaper buying. The newspapers estimated the general agitation in terms of extra sales. Circulation managers¹⁰ reported increases of from 15 to 20 per cent for all the newspapers of New York and Philadelphia during the first few days; the *Chicago American* had an average daily gain of 30,000 copies for the first two weeks. Excitement culminated in the finding of the body, when *Editor and Publisher* reported: "From a circulation standpoint the finding of the body was the biggest story since the Armistice and in some cases, the biggest story of all time."¹¹ The *New York Daily News*, New York's most widely read daily, devoted its whole back page to a photograph of the child and its whole front page to the two words "BABY DEAD," in type so large it had to be hand drawn, and sold 600,000 extras, the largest sale of extras in its career.

The public's behavior, much of it random and irrational, was the response that is given Big News. People by thousands, all over the country, felt they ought to do something themselves. Everything the Lindbergh couple did, said, ate, and wore had been known to newspaper readers for years and it is hardly surprising that great numbers who had no personal acquaintance with them felt somehow drawn into the affair. But to all readers, whether or not they felt called upon to join in the search, it was an enthralling mystery, a perfect story with no technical aspects to discourage reading and restrict the number of people interested in it. "The Lindbergh story," declared Henry Justin Smith, managing editor of the *Chicago Daily News*, "is still one of the best news stories in many years, be-

⁹ The Lindberghs had more than 3,000 letters a day during the two months of the search; the Hopewell station received 55,000 telegrams for them over Western Union alone. The *Chicago Tribune* reported more than 75,000 phone inquiries during the first ten days of the search; calls at 1:00 A.M. were not unusual (*Editor and Publisher*, April 2 and 23, 1932).

¹⁰ *Editor and Publisher*, March 12 and 19, 1932.

¹¹ May 21, 1932, pp. 5, 40, 42.

cause of its universal appeal to young and old."¹² And the American newspaper being a secular thing, organized to sell the news for which there is the greatest demand, it may be said that it was precisely this fundamental human interest in the story that set machinery in motion to effect its instant transmission to every newspaper reader.

THE LINDBERGH CASE AS WORLD NEWS

The extraordinary state of public excitement caused by the case was news, too, and the ultimate effect of the publicity at home was to send the story abroad wherever there were newspapers. And so, eventually, it became a world story. It was its merits as a human interest story that caused its diffusion in the first place, but it suffered a sea change, and when printed abroad it was often quite another thing. For where the press conceives of itself as something other than an industry producing news as a commodity, such a story may be wholly ignored or it will appear in a guise compatible with what the newspaper's function is supposed to be. In German papers the news took several forms.¹³

The most striking treatment of it appeared in *Die Rote Fahne* ("The Red Flag"), the organ of the Communist party.¹⁴ No American paper of size or importance dealt with the case in this way, and if it had it would have been anachronistic. Its prototype is the sermon, which all editorials more or less approximate.

¹² *Editor and Publisher*, March 19, 1932, p. 9.

¹³ There was great diversity among Berlin newspapers in 1932, the last year of the Republic. Though the Brüning government had resorted to frequent suppression of its most violent critics, the Communist and National-Socialist newspapers, the press still enjoyed wide freedom to print non-political news. Several types of newspapers that were quite new in Germany had developed in Berlin. However, with the advent of the dictatorship in January, 1933, the character of the press was immediately altered. Many papers were suppressed, several influential papers lost their following and became moribund, and the others survived at the cost of putting themselves in the service of the totalitarian state. If, then, the Lindbergh crime had occurred a few months later, in the time of the Third Reich, the German public would have learned much less about it. (The Ministry of Propaganda and Enlightenment forbade accounts of the questioning of Hauptmann's mother by United States investigators before the Hauptmann trial in January, 1935.) A survey of the treatment the kidnapping story received thus brings to light several conceptions of the newspaper which have been abandoned since for the doctrinaire ideal set up by the National-Socialist government.

¹⁴ May 14, 1932, inside page.

LINDBERGH'S BABY FOUND DEAD—
BANKRUPTCY OF THE AMERICAN POLICE
SENSATIONAL TURN IN THE CASE

New York, May 13.—The body of the Lindbergh child has been found in Hopewell, near the Lindbergh house, according to word received from Trenton, N.J. The body was discovered by a Negro. As he drove along in his truck, he noticed, when about three miles from the Lindbergh house, that a child's foot protruded from a pile of leaves. He notified the police at once and they identified the decomposed body as the Lindbergh child by the remains of clothing on it. The body was taken to Trenton for investigation.

This news has created a tremendous sensation in all Europe and America. For more than two months the affair has occupied two continents. Whole corps of policemen were detailed on the second of March to the search for the baby. The entire American detective force was set in motion. Detectives were dispatched to every European metropolis; the boulevard press of the whole world filled its columns with it. The baby was reported seen now in Hamburg, now in Paris, now in London, now in Vienna.

The abduction of children for *ransom in the most highly developed capitalistic land, in the United States, is not an infrequent occurrence.* In scarcely any other country does criminality blossom as in America. Of course it is rare that such a hue-and-cry is made over the disappearance of a child as in this case. Lindbergh, who crossed the ocean by plane, was, so to speak, the hero of all American patriots. The vanishing of a child from his parental home is certainly a lamentable thing, but here the Yellow Press made it a national affair. Lindbergh's child was known as "The Baby of the Nation." The governor and various patriotic organizations offered rewards. The police authorities of the whole world set in motion their criminal apparatus, but all in vain.

Finally came the news that Lindbergh had paid a ransom of \$50,000,—and the baby was not returned.

Let us consider: America boasts that it has the best trained detective system in the world. *Sacco and Vanzetti were hanged*, although the whole world was *convinced of their innocence.* The eight young Negroes sit in prison in Scottsboro, though nothing is proved,—indeed *it is clear that they are innocent*,—and await their execution. Why? Because American capital wills it and a few detectives testified against them.

And this land of Nat Pinkertons, of the hundred thousand detectives, is not able to explain a child's disappearance. Now the baby is found, a skeleton, near the Lindbergh residence. The matter is more enigmatic than before. For, if the child was abducted by extortionists, they would not have murdered it, since they had a chance to extort enormous sums.

Who is, then, the murderer of the Lindbergh baby? The suspicion has arisen,—and it is not to be ignored,—that Lindbergh himself, possibly in a fit of melancholia or for some other unknown reason, murdered the child. Since Lindbergh

is, so to speak, the fetish of the American patriots, and it is not admissible that the national fetish is capable of a criminal or insane act, the case will probably never be completely explained.

One thing, though, is clearly and unmistakably shown by the case: the *failure and bankruptcy of the American police machine in clearing up crime*.

In the greater number of Berlin newspapers the case was reported in two or three lines or a paragraph. Often it was without a heading, placed among a miscellaneous assortment of small items from all over the world. In this fashion some papers told their readers as often as twice a week how the case was progressing. It might be described as a bulletin; it resembles the short statements issued by physicians from the bedside of a prominent man. The example which follows is more detailed than usual:

LINDBERGH PAYS \$50,000—DESPITE THAT
THE BABY IS NOT RETURNED

New York, April 11.—Colonel Lindbergh has now confirmed the report that he paid \$50,000 to the kidnappers of his child. Nevertheless the child has not been returned, though he has given the kidnappers several days' time and assured there will be no prosecution. Lindbergh is now forced to engage the help of the Federal government. The Treasury has already published the numbers of the banknotes he paid out. But they are of low denominations so that discovery of the kidnapper by means of them is made difficult.

The police arrested a man in Brooklyn, who is said to be Al Capone's former lieutenant. The police decline to give more particulars. Lindbergh has given the kidnappers an ultimatum, threatening merciless pursuit.

According to a recent announcement, the kidnappers, who extorted a ransom of \$50,000 a few days ago from Lindbergh, have made it known that they will restore the child for a second payment of \$50,000.¹⁵

There were several dailies that supplied their readers with the news as a human interest story, like the one from International News Service which follows:

TOUCHING SCENE AT THE CREMATORIUM—
THE LAST RIDE OF THE LINDBERGH BABY

New York, May 14.—Colonel Lindbergh, the daring first conqueror of the ocean, trod the hardest road of his life, today, as he followed, alone, the coffin of his loved child to the crematorium at Trenton.

With bowed head and a face in which sorrow for the loss of his child had traced its mark, he walked behind the hearse which bore the tiny casket. The

¹⁵ *Neue preussische Kreuz-Zeitung*, April 12, 1932, p. 5.

unhappy father was nearing collapse as the coffin disappeared in the crematorium chamber.

Lindbergh looked for an instant through the glass window into the cremation chamber as the flames seized upon the remains of his child, and then turned, deeply moved, to leave the hall. He had the composure to whisper "Thank you," to the officials of the crematorium.¹⁶

Finally, the fourth form of telling the news was by means of half-page photographs of the child or his parents, accompanied by a line or two giving only the most exciting details. In this guise it made a "thriller."

The first two forms of reporting, the editorial and the bulletin, were regarded as indigenous and proper in Germany. The other two belonged in newspapers of a newer type, called *Massenblätter* ("papers for the masses") which the others contemptuously described as modernized, or, like everything else that is being modernized, Americanized, because their kind was known in the United States before it appeared in Germany.

Though many Berlin papers claimed to be independent of political parties, there was only one daily, *Das Zwölf-Uhr Blatt*, a picture paper, that did not indorse one party or another and, at elections, devote itself chiefly to campaigning. The relation between press and party has been described by Groth¹⁷ as either *offiziell*, designating the organ founded by a party as an instrument of propaganda, or *offiziös*, meaning the voluntary press of opinion. What a newspaper reported and how it reported it depended upon what kind of party it was associated with, and the parties ranged from the sectarian to the secular. The city's twenty-eight dailies varied in a number of characteristics along a continuum, moving from the newspaper pursuing a mission toward the newspaper responsive to a market. A survey of the Lindbergh news, as reported there, includes every type of journal, for the story was so "big" that no newspaper, however constituted, ignored it. The four ways of presenting the Lindbergh news may be taken to signalize position along the continuum.

¹⁶ *Berliner Illustrierte Nachtausgabe*, May 14, 1932, p. 2.

¹⁷ Otto Groth, *Die Zeitung: Ein System der Zeitungskunde* (Berlin and Leipzig: J. Bensheimer, 1928), Vol. I.

THE NEWS AS A SERMON

The Communist organ told the news in a way that was consistent with the outlook and constitution of a sectarian party mouthpiece.

In 1932 the German branch of the Communist party was the largest outside of Russia, and *Die Rote Fahne* in 1929 was credited¹⁸ with a circulation of 92,000 subscribers, which, multiplied by family members, meant 300,000 readers. The German Communist party was not merely a vote-getting machine. Like a religious sect, it sought to dominate every interest of its members. It supported a daily paper to furnish them the "true" interpretation of events. The party aimed at making the public of the newspaper coextensive with the membership of the party,¹⁹ and tried to convince the members that it was disloyal and immoral to read the rival bourgeois press. For the sectarian party seeks to maintain moral isolation by excluding competing patterns, recognizing in them the same threat to its authority which Bagehot says caused old oligarchies to hate trade—that

the sudden impact of new thoughts and new examples breaks down the compact despotism of the single consecrated code, and leaves pliant and impressible man

¹⁸ Wilhelm Carlé, *Weltanschauung und Presse* (Leipzig, Hirschfeld Verlag, 1931), p. 75. The estimate is made in *Albachary's Marktzahlen für Reklameverbraucher*, 1929. There are no reliable circulation statistics.

¹⁹ *Die Rote Fahne* in 1932 was comparable to what *Vorwärts*, the Social-Democratic organ, was before the legal disabilities of Socialists were removed. By 1918, having assumed the government, the Social-Democratic party had passed, as Kantorowicz puts it, completely from a sect to a party (*Die Sozialdemokratische Presse Deutschlands* [Tübingen: Mohr, 1922], p. 8). Since there is more literature on the Social-Democratic press than on the Communist, one seeks information there that will throw light on the organization that is typical of a party while it is sectarian. It is pertinent to point out here that Lasalle and Bebel urged the founding of party-owned papers, which the former proposed, in 1871, to finance by selling ten-Taler shares among trade unionists. An early phase was the setting aside of part of the union dues to support a paper which the member automatically received. It was little more than a house organ then. Within this predetermined public the newspaper was a medium of agitation and encouragement. By making members' contributions supply the income that advertising gives to bourgeois papers, Karl Kautsky maintained that the press would become one field wherein the contrast between the bourgeois world and the socialistic world could be made recognizable within the framework of the present order of society (*Neue Zeit*, Vol. XXII, p. 218, quoted by Kantorowicz, *op. cit.*, p. 5). *Die Rote Fahne*, like the organs of the other extremist parties, claimed that 90 per cent of its sales were by subscription. Cf. Paul Kampfmeyer, *Der Sozialdemokratische Pressedienst*, pp. 6-7.

—such as he then is—to follow his unpleasant will without distinct guidance by hereditary morality and hereditary religion.²⁰

Very frequently *Die Rote Fahne* was given away, for indoctrination was thought too important to wait on voluntary purchase. This means that the newspaper was not an enterprise in itself; it was a tract, important only because of its mission. In a secular society, where every article tends to compete on its merits in a market, to have a mission is likely to be a disadvantage, for it stands in the way of change. Since in founding and maintaining *Die Rote Fahne* as an offensive and defensive measure Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg had in mind the growth of the party and not the growth of the paper, it came about that they endowed it with a constitution that handicapped it as a newspaper. Editors were chosen by a press commission on the basis of their accomplishments as election campaigners, and not as newspapermen.²¹ Moreover, the reward to the editor who could issue a telling "leading article" was usually a nomination as a party candidate,²² and he was thus disposed to look upon the paper as a means to advancement in another sphere. He was likely to be more sensitive to the will of the party commission which supervised the organ than to the tastes of the readers.

It was not surprising, therefore, that *Die Rote Fahne* was edited with conscientiousness and consistency at the expense of being inter-

²⁰ Walter Bagehot, *Physics and Politics* (London: Appleton, 1873), p. 39.

²¹ That the sectarian paper in not an end in itself is demonstrated by the method of selection of editors in the early days of the Social-Democratic party: "I was a candidate in a city of 180,000 inhabitants. The choice was narrow. First there were introductions, and then there was a test to show if I could speak in public, and on what subjects, held in the largest room. Then inquiries were made into my morals. And finally,—but only quite incidentally—came the question whether I could fill the post of editor satisfactorily" (Emil Rabold, *Mitteilungen des Vereins Arbeiterpresse* [1913], quoted by Kantorowicz, *op. cit.*, p. 92).

²² "The social democratic editor is, before everything else, a political leader," according to Kantorowicz (*op. cit.*, p. 98). He goes on to say that, in 1912, 14 per cent of the Federal candidates of the Social-Democratic party were editors of party papers, while less than 2 per cent of the candidates of other parties were editors. In 1914, 55 editors, or 23 per cent of the 241 Social-Democratic editors in Germany were candidates for election to the Reichstag, which, as Kantorowicz remarks, means that the editor has little time for the paper (*op. cit.*, pp. 102-3).

esting. Nothing extraneous to the party's mission appeared in its pages. There was no serial story. The sport page reported the news of none but Communist sports clubs. Realizing that the advertiser and the advertisement exercise a certain control over the reader, and that they interpose an alien interest, the Communist editor accepted with reluctance the announcements of other than party members.²³ The news was continually subordinated to prodding and proselytizing. There was no "city page" where, in other Berlin dailies, miscellaneous news of accidents, fires, crimes, and such matters of general interest were printed. "The forcefulness, the point, and the real life of the paper lies in another direction,—in agitation, in the propagation of theory, polemics, and critiques. The day's news is only important as pedagogical material."²⁴

The Lindbergh case was interpreted in terms of Marxian ideology and used to point the invariable moral. Propaganda is worthless unless it is read, and so the editor was constantly tempted to make concessions to vulgar curiosity, for which he had to answer to the press commission. Since any mention of the kidnapping would be sure to interest the readers, the news was accompanied by a large photograph of the child and given a page-wide headline, all in the hope of inducing the reader to read on into the sermon, which, in the example quoted, was six times as long. A sermon is a doctrinaire exposition built on premises on which the faithful agree. In the light of the premises a contemporary event is translated into the familiar

²³ Lasalle and Bebel thought that the party organ's integrity would be threatened by the income from advertising and they tried to keep the early Social-Democratic papers free from it (Kantorowicz, *op. cit.*, pp. 6, 7, 58). No party organ in Germany is so stringent now as to agree with Lasalle that advertising necessarily turns a paper into an "industrial speculation" (*Über die Feste, die Presse und den Frankfurter Abgeordnetentag, 1863*, *Politische Reden und Schriften* [ed. Erich Blum], I, 129). Of course, advertisers of certain classes of commodities know that it would not pay them to buy space in a workers' paper, and the decision to keep out is made by them, not by the press commission. On the other hand, the principles of the party account for the absence of several types of advertising that they could have and that are often found in papers read by low-income levels of the population, e.g., advertisements of money-lending, questionable literature.

²⁴ Comment on the old sectarian socialist press by Karl Leuthner, quoted by Kantorowicz, *op. cit.*, p. 41. Even the market reports were made to teach a lesson in party theory (Meynen and Reuter, *Die deutsche Zeitung* [Munich: Duncker und Humblot, 1928], p. 183).

moral issue. Although the hearers know it all in advance and are never taken by surprise, the exhorter is under an inner compulsion to speak his piece to the bitter end. The pains taken to give his message the appearance of being new and striking ordinarily spend themselves in a promising opening paragraph.

The crime had no intrinsic interest for the editor. Death, if of a Sacco or a Vanzetti, has a purpose, but what bearing has the tragedy of a bourgeois baby on the only thing that matters, the Revolution? For the propagandist cannot afford to write stories for their human interest; it makes readers reflective and sympathetic, but the party wants them unresting and doctrinaire. Told with human interest, the Lindbergh news would show an enemy outsider sharing the common nature of man, and that threatens to mitigate the hatred of his class. The individual in communistic philosophy is inconsequential. Sectarianism, in *Die Rote Fahne*, showed itself as a policy of isolation, a kind of ethnocentrism, which denies worth to any human values outside of those that are instrumental to its objectives. It took the most relentlessly fanatical press in the world to suppress the human and the tragic in the story and make all its implications political.

THE NEWS AS A BULLETIN

Apart from *Die Rote Fahne*, there were twelve official party organs published in Berlin in 1932. They did not exhibit as unified a character as *Die Rote Fahne* because they were, for the most part, the spokesmen of more or less secular parties. The most interesting of them was *Vorwärts* ("Forward") the organ of the Social-Democrats, for its career, beginning in 1884, has been bound up with the vicissitudes of a party that was once as uncompromising as the Communist party; indeed German Communism began as a faction in it.

The Social-Democratic party was a proletarian movement that started in a labor union congress and ultimately, in 1918, achieved a dominant position in the state. The sectarian party urges revolution; the secular party proposes reform. The more a party is at peace with the *status quo* the less agitating and doctrinaire its press. The revolutionary party's worst fate, as Sorel²⁵ has pointed out, is to get

²⁵ Georges Sorel, "Letter to Daniel Halevy" in *Reflections on Violence* (New York: Huebsch, 1914), p. 40.

into office, for then it dies as a revolutionary party; the exigencies of administration force it into compromises at the expense of its doctrine. Consequently, as the Social-Democratic party turned its attention from revolution to reform the party newspapers took on a new character.

The path of the Social-Democratic party from the sect to the party and on to the mass movement leads, in the case of its press, from the union organ to the propaganda organ and on to the modern newspaper. But in history the separate epochs are not sharply divided, and that holds true of the history of the Social-Democratic party press.²⁶

When the sect becomes a denomination its adherents achieve a measure of private life. In the same way, the subscriber to the party organ finds himself emancipated from the didactic editor as the party grows increasingly secular, and this is the more true if the party succeeds to power. Then, unless the party has a monopoly of power, the party politician is replaced in the editorial rooms by the professional journalist. Nazi papers in Germany and *Pravda* in Russia never made the change. No longer an uncompromising propaganda sheet, the party paper emerges as a journal of opinion. In order to gain an audience for its views it seeks to popularize itself.

This was a transition that was most spectacularly effected in the case of the Socialist Jewish *Daily Forward*, of New York, when Abraham Kahn took over the editorship. It was dying of intellectualism and dogma.²⁷ He trebled its circulation in two months by substituting human interest for doctrine. Since readers are bored and alienated by controversial articles which they find hard to follow, he used short news stories and, in particular, the *Bintelbrief*

²⁶ Kantorowicz, *op. cit.*, p. 8. Since the party's founding its program has year by year been more reconcilable with the democratic rather than the socialistic state. The Program of 1925 declared "Socialism is irreconcilable with domination by force and cannot be accomplished by such means. Its foundation is democracy" (quoted by Carlé, *op. cit.*, p. 82).

²⁷ Since Goebbels has undertaken the tutelage of the press in the Third Reich, circulation has fallen off. Between December and April, 1933-34, after a year of National Socialism, the circulation of Berlin newspapers declined by more than 75,000. *Der Angriff*, Goebbels' Berlin daily, declined to 94,200 in December, 1933, to 68,600 in February, and to 60,000 in March. Officials have voiced naïve complaints that people will not read "co-ordinated" newspapers, but little freedom is allowed them to become anything but acquiescent propaganda sheets. See Frederic Schumann, *The Nazi Dictatorship* (New York: Knopf, 1935), pp. 304-6.

("Letters to the Editor") as a means of laying before the East Side Jews what their economic and religious problems actually were. The personal letters, because they were so true, so human, and so distressingly familiar, secured the Socialist organ readers who were not political sympathizers, and the paper actually made a profit. But *Forward* ceased "to be only the organ of the doctrinaires and became an instrument of . . . a new culture, based on the common life of man."²⁸ The change may be stated as a shift in the balance between the important and the interesting.

In Berlin, *Vorwärts* was edited with less penetration, but the staff did convert it from a union organ to a family newspaper, by printing supplementary sections on books, games, fashions, and housekeeping to interest women and young people, and an evening edition modeled on a successful boulevard sheet. It went further in its trafficking with the world by endeavoring to sell the evening edition to anonymous buyers on the street corners, and it solicited advertisements. When it has reached that point the sectarian organ has all but turned into a commercial newspaper.²⁹

Berlin's twelve party organs of 1932 may be located at various points along this line of progression from press of opinion to commercial press.

In Berlin the pure party organ was threatened by the competition of the *offiziös* newspapers, the voluntary journals of opinion.³⁰ They

²⁸ Robert E. Park, *The Immigrant Press and Its Control* (Harper Bros., 1922), p. 109.

²⁹ By 1931 there were ten times as many voters for the Social-Democrats' list as there were party members. Since many of them were interested in the official statements, without being thoroughgoing converts, the paper inclined to a moderation of statement that was absent before the party came to power (Carlé, *op. cit.*, p. 172). The editor-in-chief of *Vorwärts*, Friedrich Stampfer, was an experienced politician but an able journalist, too. His colleagues were mostly newspapermen who were specialists (Groth, *op. cit.*, II, 429; Meynen and Reuter, *op. cit.*, p. 56). As its circulation grew, *Die Rote Fahne* took display advertising, but strong political control prevented its yielding as to doctrine.

³⁰ Besides *Vorwärts* and its evening edition, *Der Abend*, the party organs were: *Berlin am Morgen*, a Communist paper, more popular and local than *Die Rote Fahne*; *Der Angriff*, Goebbels' Berlin publication; *Die neue preussische Kreuz-Zeitung*, spokesman of the Stahlhelm, a monarchistic military organization; *Der Reichsbote*, "Christian national daily for evangelical Germany, for Faith and Home, Christianity and Fatherland"; *Die tägliche Rundschau*, organ of the Protestant and nationalistic Christian Social

were the most independent, the most enterprising, and by far the largest in the Reich. Most of the dailies in this class belonged to two great publishing houses, which did an enormous business in advertising, printing, and book publishing. Not being bound to any political organization, their owners were free to experiment with them. This was a rare situation in Germany and perhaps only possible in a large city. Out of it there issued a modernized newspaper that stressed news as well as comment. It was much influenced by American patterns. It was a type adapted to the habits of a metropolitan populace, which buys newspapers on stands and reads them in streetcars and subways. By being more diversified, by printing more advertising, and, especially, more news, it attracted wide sale among,

People's Service party; *Die deutsche Tageszeitung*, organ of the Christian National Peasant and Agrarian People's party; *Die deutsche allgemeine Zeitung*, conservative and nationalistic, once the mouthpiece of Bismarck, then Stinnes, then the state of Prussia; *Der Deutsche*, organ of the Catholic Trade Unions; *Germania*, spokesman, in 1932, of Brüning and the Berlin Catholic Union; *Die märkische Volkszeitung*, a more popular Catholic paper for the less well-to-do than *Germania's* readers; *Die deutsche Zeitung*, a Nationalist party propaganda sheet. Most of these papers claimed to sell 80 or 90 per cent of their output by subscription. Some of them, being the organs of very small parties, had circulations between six and seven thousand.

There were seven *offiziös* papers. Two were business papers: *Die Börsen Zeitung*, official daily of the stock market, and *Der Börsen Courier*, which was Republican, while the former was Nationalistic. Mosse and Ullstein are the two syndicates, of which the former's papers were: *Das Berliner Tageblatt*, a "world newspaper," with a Sunday circulation of a quarter-million; *Die Berliner Volks-Zeitung* for "the Democratic *Kleinbürger*," whose evening edition, at four pfennigs, was the cheapest in the city; *Die Berliner Morgenzeitung*, smaller and more popular than the *Tageblatt*. These and the Ullstein papers were Republican. Ullstein issued: *Die Vossische Zeitung*, which carried no classified advertising and no photographs and was Berlin's oldest paper; *Die Morgenpost*, the largest paper in Germany, for the *kleiner Mann*, with a circulation said to be half a million, carried pages of classified and department-store advertising.

Ullstein and Mosse papers enjoyed most of the department-store advertising and they issued quarterly notarial statements of circulation, probably for the same reason that American papers do, to gain the advertisers' confidence. From a study of the newspaper yearbooks, it seems safe to say that the *offiziell* papers circulated in tens of thousands, but the *offiziös* in hundreds of thousands. The former were particularly secretive about their size, as a result of their traditional indifference to advertising and the fear lest circulation statistics betray the party's strength or weakness.

The business papers had political opinions, but they tried to capture readers on the basis of professional interests. The business intelligencer, in the long run, is bound to be secular, for it is only of value if it admits no loyalty beyond loyalty to the truth of its reports.

not only the city's hordes of politically unorganized, but the subscribers to party organs as well.

It is not surprising that the founders of the Ullstein and Mosse syndicates were Jewish. The Jew, because in Germany he has had to depend on resourcefulness to advance himself, has played the rôle of innovator, and it was he who introduced the commercial newspaper which cuts across party lines and appeals to a wide public. The "German type" of journal is thought of as the small exclusive party paper, but the financial success of these others was a persistent influence toward the secularization of all the press, and, eventually, as Hitler rightly divined, toward what he calls *Asphaltkultur* ("pavement culture"), a term that connotes "rational cosmopolitan civilization," which is hated and feared by the Nazis as the despoiler of the folk-spirit in national life.

Berlin's *offiziell* and *offiziös* dailies printed Lindbergh news as a bulletin of just the essential facts, like the statement issued to the American police to notify them of the crime. This is the convention that is appropriate in reporting events that are important to the subscriber. Yet the abduction of a baby several thousand miles away was hardly of importance to the ordinary Berlin reader, who was not used to seeing even local crime "played up," and the inappropriateness and unconventionality of the item no doubt account for the annoyance that was often expressed at the repeated mention of the case. Thus there was an anomaly in the use of the bulletin form in reporting the Lindbergh case, for the facts issued from Hopewell and New York were primarily intended for publication in American papers, which exploit the human interest in the news in order to attract the total public.

Regarding themselves as public documents, the newspapers that called themselves national organs and world intelligencers fulfilled their purpose by making a bare record of the news. The *offiziös* dailies printed more local news, but because they considered the news as important as political homilies and were using the news to enlarge their circulation, they supplied their readers with fuller and more frequent bulletins on the case and placed them in more prominent positions in the paper.

THE NEWS AS A HUMAN-INTEREST STORY

The Lindbergh news appeared as human-interest stories in the boulevard press. This term designated four papers³¹ specializing in sport and theater news, that were read at coffee-time in restaurants and at the races. They published political news, as the others did, in the partisan spirit, but their readers outnumbered the voters of the parties they supported. They were not regarded as a political force. Just how such newspapers took form in a world where the newspaper is thought of as a political instrument is demonstrated by the history of *Der Lokalanzeiger* ("Local Advertiser").

Der Lokalanzeiger was founded by August Scherl in 1883. He was a theatrical director who remained a showman after he turned publisher. He began the paper as a small weekly circular of classified advertising, particularly of employment. This attracted white-collar and working-class readers. An exciting serial romance went with the advertising. Then he added local news of fires, accidents, suicides, and the like and made it a daily newspaper.³² He built up a news-gathering service, printed photographs, cooking recipes, and letters to the editor and ran a daily column of free legal advice. He did what any publisher does who has no political backing but wants to attract the greatest possible number of readers; he ignored conventions, tried experiments—the boulevard paper has been called "the daredevil among newspapers"—and made everything he printed pass the test: "Will people like it?" The person he wanted to please was "the little man," the mass public. Ten years after its founding *Der Lokalanzeiger* was the largest newspaper in Berlin; in twenty years it boasted 150,000 subscribers, far more than most papers had in 1932. All this was accompanied by a noisy campaign to advertise the daily to readers and to cultivate the market in classified advertising.

³¹ Ullstein issued a boulevard sheet called *Die Berliner Zeitung am Mittag*, or, commonly, *Die B.Z.* It was Republican. The monarchistic Scherl Syndicate published three, *Der Lokalanzeiger*, *Der Tag*, and *Die Illustrierte Nachtausgabe*. *Der Tag*, the most conventional, is alone a morning paper. Party organs are morning papers, except for the evening edition of *Vorwärts* which was lighter in tone and put out to keep party members away from the influence of the evening issues of the *offiziös* papers and the boulevard sheets.

³² Groth *op. cit.*, I, 258 and II, 536-37. Scherl and his paper parallel Northcliffe and his *Answers to Correspondents*, founded in 1888. Scherl was an admirer of Northcliffe.

In 1913 the Scherl concern was bought by the government and *Der Lokalanzeiger* was put in the hands of a committee which decided it should "no longer be a paper for news and sensation, but an elevated journal with good economic and political articles."³³ By 1916 this well-intentioned policy had brought a deficit of ten million marks, for there were plenty of elevated papers and the transformation made no new patrons for *Der Lokalanzeiger*; it did cost it its old friends. The Scherl Press was then taken over by Hugenberg, a business man associated with the Krupp Steel Works, who ran as presidential candidate in 1932 on the Monarchistic ticket. Though professing a distaste for the principles which had made the Scherl papers great and rich, he saw it was profitable to conserve "the Scherl spirit." The formula of journalism that he arrived at was distinctly un-German and commercial:

The higher the level of a newspaper the smaller its circle of readers. Thus the level must be based on the taste of the masses. The technique of sensationalism . . . which Northcliffe perfected as "the technique of the talking point" must be developed,—meaning the art of directing the attention of wide circles of people to one event for one day with magnetic power. . . . In this way circulation is attained, which then brings the most important desideratum, advertisements. For the income from advertising is the principal revenue of a great newspaper.³⁴

He directed that the papers were to be written simply and adapted in make-up for sale on the street rather than by subscription. Inevitably the technique of the talking point resulted in a paper that was pastime reading-matter for the boulevard and café public, and not taken very seriously, even in its political columns.³⁵ The mood which the traditional papers kept for the feuilleton pervaded every page, even the front page, where, eight times in two months, *Die*

³³ Carlé, *op. cit.*, pp. 157-58.

³⁴ Quoted by Carlé, *op. cit.*, pp. 157-58. Though professing to ignore the ethical mission of the German newspaper, Hugenberg did act as though he believed in it, since during his candidacy he used the papers like a hustings for his speeches and placards.

³⁵ Twenty-two per cent of the quarter-million readers given *Der Lokalanzeiger* by *Albachary's Directory* in 1929 were reached by newsstands (Groth, *op. cit.*, I, 258). Seventy-eight per cent of the readers were subscribers—much more than the number of votes cast for the *Deutschnational* ticket, which it supported (Carlé, *op. cit.*, p. 160). Ullstein's *offiziös* paper, *Die Vossische Zeitung*, claimed 66,350 readers in 1927, but their boulevard paper, *Die B.Z.* claimed 186,000.

B.Z., which is edited in the same spirit, put Lindbergh news instead of national affairs.

Though they were nominally news dispatches, the boulevard sheets' Lindbergh reports told how the child's parents *felt* through the ordeal. The inferences about the event as a personal experience help the reader to appreciate it. But they are not facts of the same order as the facts—like that of the ransom-paying—given by the bulletins of the political press. Not the practical problem, but the person in the news, is put in the forefront and the kidnapping is presented in terms of his suffering. In the boulevard press the individual, with his private sentiments, his anxieties, and his common human nature, was the important thing.

Told with imagination and intuition, the Lindbergh news became more like a fiction story from one of the popular weeklies than like the news of the other papers. For the reader, riding in the subway or sitting over his coffee, did not buy the paper for a practical purpose in his rôle as elector; he only wanted distraction. And he got it in a paper that ranged far afield for stories of personal experiences which he could understand as a human being, since, as such, he moved in a larger world than the local political arena. Like the "yellow" press in the United States, the boulevard papers secured enormous circulation by making the news into literature.

THE NEWS AS A THRILLER

Berlin had three picture papers³⁶ in 1932. They were boulevard sheets, but in a class commonly distinguished by the name *Revolverblätter*, because they printed photographs of the scenes of crime. They were a recent phenomenon and appeared only in Berlin, like the American tabloids which subsist in only a few of the largest cities. The class may be exemplified by its most thoroughgoing mem-

³⁶ *Das Zwölf-Uhr Blatt* was a noon paper specializing in news of the race track. *Das Acht-Uhr Abendblatt*, a Mosse paper, ran a half-page photograph on page 1 to advertise Lindbergh news. *Tempo*, Ullstein's boulevard paper, had more pictures than any other Berlin paper. *Die Welt am Abend* was the Communists' sport and picture paper. Its place in the series was nearer the political papers than the others were, yet it printed a good deal of local news, just because it was interesting. It referred to the Lindbergh case on twenty days; *Die Rote Fahne* on five. In all four, the same item, a suicide pact, or the Lindbergh case, for example, was frequently featured on page 1 as Big News. Such concurrence on a piece of non-political news was very rare in journals of opinion.

ber, *Das Zwölf-Uhr Blatt* ("The Twelve-O'Clock Paper"), founded in 1918.

Except for the fact that it reported news and appeared every day, there was almost nothing in common between this *Revolverblatt*, at one pole, and the political papers at the other. A noon paper with offices in the bright-lights district of Berlin, it was a purely commercial enterprise, ready to exploit any interest whatsoever that the boulevard public might manifest. It made sport of the thing held most sacred by "the German press," by running a betting contest on the returns of the presidential election. Ordinarily politics was ignored in favor of exciting general news. There was no leading article. It was principally a sporting sheet with a survey of cabarets, vaudevilles, and motion pictures which comprised the only routine news. The advertising was inconsiderable. What there was came from places of amusement and physical culture schools, with some dubious announcements from skin doctors, pawnshops, and purveyors of erotic books and "art" postcards. There were daily instalments of a murder mystery.

News value in the American sense was recognized by position on the front or back page and by a series of headlines in red and black ink. The best material for the paper was photographs of accidents, fires, suicides, trials, and crimes, a great many of which were local. One column on the front page was devoted to reading matter and three to photographs.

The Lindbergh news was reported by photographs on the front and back page with an explanatory line below to relate the latest development. This is the most sensational of all ways of telling the news. For it is a shock to the reader to see a photograph of a baby with his birthday cake—a picture that was very popular with the American papers, too—and to learn in fifty words that this child has been kidnapped for ransom, murdered, and finally discovered, a nearly unrecognizable corpse, not far from his parents' house.

Apparently the readers' interest lagged unless something unusually sensational happened. But on days when the editor had exciting news, the illustrations reported it in an elemental way that almost succeeded in making not only imagination but literacy unnecessary.

This was the guise in which it was acceptable matter for *Das Zwölf-Uhr Blatt* because it could give a pleasurable thrill to a numerous public of lethargic, *blasé* city folk.

THE NEWS AND THE STORY

Here were four different kinds of news-reporting, but they all had their inception in that police broadcast from Trenton.

Whereas the American daily is an omnibus, publishing editorials, advertisements, news, and stories based on news, most Berlin papers tended to specialize.³⁷ Thus the organ of the sectarian party turned everything into editorial; the independent press of opinion emphasized news and advertising; and the boulevard papers gave first place to entertaining matter. The emphasis corresponded to the aspect of the reader which the newspaper served. The sermon was intended for an exclusive subscribing circle of party members. It presented the news as something which called for action, and hastened to supply a solution in terms of a political program. The bulletin was addressed to a larger body of citizens as men of affairs, and it represented the case as a problem in crime detection. With its external view of the affair, it caused the reader to make judgments about American lawlessness and perhaps to ask, as one newspaper did, "Can that happen in Berlin?" In each case the interest was manipulative or technical. For these papers specialized in the things that were important news to their readers, and news is in a universe of discourse, corresponding to the relatively small field in which the reader acts and lives in his mind. The inescapable fact of universal preoccupation with the affair compelled the editor to admit the news to his columns, but he did so by referring it to the familiar world of thought and action. But in the human-interest story and the thriller the intention was not to incite to action, but to divert the reader. They were printed to build up circulation by attracting and entertaining people of every party and occupation. Therefore the reader was conceived of as a person and not in any special aspect.

³⁷ It was stated at the Institut für Zeitungskunde in Berlin that it was a common habit to supplement the reading of one paper, say a morning political paper, with another, probably a boulevard sheet, in the afternoon. There is no research on the subject, however.

In the United States, newspapermen unanimously recognized these events as making "the greatest human-interest story of the decade." Indeed they have declared again and again that news about lost children is "naturally" a good human-interest story, and they cite famous stories by Weddoc, E. E. Hill, and Julian Ralph as instances. But their view of the matter is grounded in the conception of journalism that has been universal in America ever since Bennett exploited the editorial privilege to make popular literature for the masses. The German papers, with their wide diversity of types, demonstrate that the news is given the form appropriate to the newspaper that prints it. What will be made of it depends on the newspaper that prints it; it does not lie in the intrinsic nature of the event.

When, however, a paper exists to promulgate some political or theological abstraction, it attributes importance to only those eccentric aspects of men and events that promote its ends. Though such objectives are invariably stated in terms of the welfare and happiness of all, there is no stopping to count the cost if an individual is sacrificed to them. It is in the newspaper that has no exalted mission and only mercenary motives that the focus of attention is the person and the things he thinks important.

McGILL UNIVERSITY

A Genealogy of Human Interest Stories

**By
Helen MacGill Hughes**

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A Genealogy of Human Interest Stories

By Helen MacGill Hughes

Miss Hughes, a member of the staff of the Department of Sociology, McGill University, Montreal, wrote her doctoral thesis on "The Human Interest Story: A Study of Popular Literature" under Professor Robert Park, University of Chicago, in 1936.

WHAT ARE human interest stories?

Most newspaper men, asked this question, will answer by citing examples. They ordinarily assume that the news events that make "good" human interest stories are those possessing some intrinsic property lacking in other events. But Julian Ralph, whose human interest stories in the old New York *Sun* are famous in the craft, was said to be able to write 500 words about a cobblestone and make it interesting.

Cobblestones, of course, are hardly cited as "natural" human interest material. The events that yield "good" stories are precisely those that have yielded "good" ones in the past and have become traditional. There was a time when none

was considered suitable newspaper copy: each made its debut at one time or another as an unremarked event in the history of the American newspaper. Each of these precursors, as it appeared, helped to define more clearly the qualities of a "good" human interest story.

Probably no story of 100 years ago was as widely read as those of the now-famous Moon Hoax. This was a series of faked "scientific" stories run by Benjamin Day in 1835 in his penny paper, the New York *Sun*. They set forth the "Great Astronomical Discoveries, lately made by Sir John Herschell at the Cape of Good Hope." Public excitement was intense when the crowning revelation appeared—a description of winged creatures, "scien-

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tifically denominated *vespertilio homo*, or man-bat," that inhabited the moon. Technical jargon gave the "discoveries" an air of authenticity, and when the excited readers learned "these are doubtless innocent and happy creatures . . . notwithstanding some of their amusements would but ill comport with our terrestrial notions of decorum," they took it for the inhuman and tantalizing restraint of the man of science, and were doubly convinced.

This extraordinary story brought to the little penny paper readers by hundreds from a quarter it never hoped to invade. A few of the sober sixpenny dailies reprinted it for the benefit of their readers who, they hoped, did not buy the *Sun*, but the great general interest in it made Day's four-page journal more widely read than any newspaper in the world. This was something new. The conventional high-priced papers and the penny press — the former running news of business and politics for the educated, the latter police-court anecdotes and town gossip for "artizans and mechanics" — reflected the divergent interests of the two bodies of readers. They had not been in actual competition till now. But the Moon Hoax showed that what enthralls the plain man will also interest the sophisticate; it was probably the first news-story to win an audience so widely inclusive. And its success suggested that the common and familiar curiosities and natural wonders of everyday life, which all people speculate upon from childhood, furnish one type of news that catches everyone's imagination.

The Moon Hoax, at the same time, represents the new use of the newspaper to entertain. At a time

when the public prints concentrated upon news of urgent public matters, it was a novelty for a newspaper to refuse advertising and enlarge its format just for a fanciful tale. But whenever a reader asked his friends, "Did you see that in the *Sun* this morning?" he advertised the paper, and so, because it was profitable, editors began to seek out news that would make pleasant pastime reading.

Once the amusement of the readers, not their enlightenment, had become a newspaper's aim, events were judged not on their public importance, but on their potentialities as stories. In the office of the *Sun*, Day's police court reporter, Wisner, covered routine cases perfunctorily; but he "wrote up" with some striving for effect the trials that he saw would make unusually amusing or pathetic narratives. He was the first reporter to "go after the good ones" consciously. Years later Charles Dana, the *Sun's* most famous editor, gave to such items the name human interest stories.

Established, as Edgar Allan Poe wrote,¹ by the success of the Moon story, the penny press enlarged its news coverage, carrying "the human interest touch" to new types of story.

THE MASS PAPERS were the only ones to tell people what they really wanted to know about crime. Because of the historical accident that it was the first notable murder after James Gordon Bennett set up the second penny daily in New York, the Robinson-Jewett trial of 1836 was the first to become

¹ Stedman, E. C., and Woodberry, G. E.: "Works of Edgar Allan Poe," VIII, p. 178.

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a public circus in the modern manner. The respectable sixpenny papers covered it in the formal way conventional in reporting crime. But Bennett, exploiting the customary privilege granted editors because they were "in the public business," came, saw all — and then abandoned the rôle of responsible editor for that of chattering gossip. The victim was a courtesan in New York's most expensive house of vice and Bennett made the murder the occasion for describing the wicked elegance of the place, revealing to thrilled outsiders a life known hitherto only to the *demi-monde* and its wealthy patrons.² The popularity of Bennett's *Herald* was as natural as that of a talkative sheriff or coroner. The murder was, of course, the topic of the day; men told and retold it to one another and, when they found the *Herald* knew more than any of them, they hastened to buy it.

What the readers enjoyed most about Bennett's story was the sense he gave them of participating immediately in the affair. He accomplished it by direct discourse and the interview. Here was the inception of the tendency so marked in today's journalism for so much copy, whether by the use of personal documents, interviews or ghost-writing, to approximate confessions. For the more completely a story is told in terms of private passions and ambitions — that is, the more events are humanized — the more imaginable and hence the more interesting do they become. The revolutionary thing that Bennett did was to use the murder as an excuse to tell as much as possible of the private lives of the participants. The career of a

living and contemporary murderer and his victim, written so that everyone could enjoy it, was a thrilling innovation.³ In this story Bennett pioneered the procedure, common now to all American newspapers, which Whitelaw Reid described as "taking the roof off every man's house." The new technique persisted because it attracted readers.

HAVING DISCOVERED the plain man's taste for "personal stuff," the popular press used every sort of event — betrothal, bereavement, divorce, suicide — as the entrée to private, personal life, obscure or famous. Through their being made compellingly interesting, these stories reached thousands of readers and acquired an adventitious notoriety out of proportion to their public importance. This circumstance made the Charlie Ross kidnaping famous in 1874. An unsolved mystery which for years kept cropping up in the news,⁴ it established the tradition that the Story of the Lost Child is pre-eminently good copy. Julian Ralph wrote a famous feature on the fate of foundlings; Edwin Hill's story, "A little Child in the Dark," and David Graham Phillips' report on the child found in the Catskills,

³ Nineteenth-century biography was typically a two-volume record of the "Life and Times" of some statesman, soldier or literary man. It was not within the orbit of readers of the penny press. The more eventful careers of desperadoes and low characters were not then the subject of literary work, and dime novels did not bring them into popular literature until the time of the Civil War.

⁴ For a full account, see Edward H. Smith, "Mysteries of the Missing" (New York: The Dial Press, 1927), chapter one. A sample of the story's recurrence is a front page item in the *New York Tribune*, March 29, 1909: "Thinks He's Charlie Ross; Brakeman Advances Solution of Old Germantown Mystery."

² *New York Herald*, issues of April, 1886.

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all printed in the *Sun*, are classics of newspaper literature. Newspapermen called the Lindbergh case the greatest human interest story of the decade, because, having a newspaper acquaintance with the parents already, readers followed the tragedy with the same eagerness with which they talk of the affairs of their own friends. The fundamental appeal of domestic affliction was summed up in an order given by Emile Gauvreau, managing editor of the tabloid New York *Graphic*, to his city editor: "We got to have some mother's tears. Everybody's got a mother, you know."⁵ The popular newspaper focuses on those things that everyone understands, or can be made to understand through the reporter's intuition and imagination.

"**EVERY TRAINED JOURNALIST**," wrote Will Irwin, "understands that no minor story succeeds better than a story about an animal, such as the dog who rescued his master from fire or drowning."⁶ Again led by the *Sun*, which carried little items about animals every day, the newspapers began to exploit any incident in the news that served to make more striking the similarity, and hence the contrast, between man and beast. The country press, in particular, cultivates animal stories, for it is not free to turn local human life into stories to make the readers laugh or cry. Outstanding successes, like the one below, seem to be enjoyed because they embody a comment on some common human quality.

⁵ "The Rise and Fall of a Tabloid," *American Mercury*, July, 1934, pp. 306-314.

⁶ "The American Newspaper," *Collier's*, March 18, 1911, p. 17.

An old family horse, belonging to the Marcks Brothers of Lakeside, and raised by them from a colt on their ranch above El Capitan, died last week. Last year he was turned out to green pastures, his twenty-five years of intimate and dependable service ended. Weeks on end the old fellow roamed where he pleased and was seldom seen.

Last Thursday Walter Marcks saw the old horse making his way slowly up the road. The animal came directly to him, where he was working behind the house. It seemed lonesome for the human companionship it had enjoyed during a long life. "Old Bill" craned his neck at the touch of Mr. Marcks' stroking hand.

A slight shudder and then Old Bill sank to the ground.⁷

It is true of all these news stories that they are never new; they are variations on an old theme. The plots have already had a long life in folklore and literature; they are so familiar that even papers like the tabloids, written for people who read no books, invoke legendary names like Casanova, Lochinvar and Cinderella as an economical yet pregnant way of conveying a situation.⁸ If Life is reminiscent of Art it is because both are preoccupied with the same dilemmas.

Being recurrent, the plots are limited in number.⁹ Human experience,

⁷ Awarded the Crowell Publishing Company's 1935 prize to the best country newspaper correspondent, and written by J. W. Peterson of the *El Cajon Valley News* (Calif.). See *Time*, July 29, 1935, p. 41.

⁸ R. B. Sullivan: "The Classy Allusion," *Esquire*, December, 1936, p. 94.

⁹ Gozzi, the Italian playwright, said there are thirty-six possible plots, but Goethe and Schiller could not find so

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though varied, is endlessly duplicated, and an individual's unique career is a type when numbers of people are considered. And so, paradoxically, these stories that always make the front page are common as events. They revolve about family life and sudden changes in fortune and position, things that all men meet in the course of their own lives or learn about by perceiving the experience in others.¹⁰ And when it is an extraordinary coincidence or an exceptional event like murder, the story portrays a situation that finds all men just human beings, subject to the same sensations.

Human interest, as judged from the types of stories, is the interest in the common fortunes, fears and fates of mankind, appearing in a new expression. The human aspect of these common events is their pri-

many. It is said there are nine jokes. When the author of "The Cohens and the Kelley's" — a play whose resemblance to "Abie's Irish Rose," is unmistakable — was threatened with a suit for plagiarism, the defense was that the pattern came from "Romeo and Juliet." In another field of popular entertainment, a writer for the "pulp" confessed that he had for years drawn plots from the Bible, modernized them and sold them to the sex magazines. — Marcus Duffield, "The Pulp," *Vanity Fair*, June, 1938, p. 27.

¹⁰ Many newspapermen refer human interest to emotion. Leech and Carroll, relating it to "news-interest," say: "It is summed up in . . . Life and Death, Desire for Amusement, Curiosity, Ambition and Cupidity, Wealth and Poverty, Religious Hope, Generosity and Stinginess, Honesty and Dishonesty, Heroism and Fear. . . . A triple classification is based on the themes of money, love and religion." — "What's the News?" (Chicago: Covici Fascial, 1926), p. 5.

G. W. Johnson answers the question by saying, "The spectacle of human folly, depravity, weakness or misery is always news." — "What Is News?" (Knopf, 1926), p. 47. Stanley Walker writes: "Women, wampum and wrong-doing are always news." — "City Editor" (Frederick Stokes, 1934), p. 44.

The intent of these and of many similar statements is that the things that interest all readers are aspects of personal life, as displayed in crises that are not the exceptional, but the common lot.

vate momentousness to the persons involved.

Human interest is the interest of laymen. It never lies in the important or official aspect of the news. Theodore Roosevelt perceived this, to his political advantage. At a time when he appeared to have lost public sympathy, he embarked on an enterprise that he knew would make a Big Story, his African big-game hunt.

THERE WAS GOOD precedent for the Roosevelt story. The younger Bennett's most lucrative inspiration had been to send Henry Morton Stanley to find David Livingstone, a missionary lost in what was intriguingly called "darkest Africa." Stanley's success in 1871, after a two-year search, created a sensation in Europe and America, and the ridiculously formal greeting, "Dr. Livingstone, I presume?" which climaxed his report in the *Herald* became familiar to the whole English-speaking world. This trip and Stanley's later explorations made a famous series of news stories and brought literature based on contemporary adventurers into the newspaper. Years later, in 1909, Roosevelt's safari inspired the same kind of romantic tale.

Begun immediately after Taft replaced him in the White House, the hunt rescued Roosevelt from the semi-obscurity that surrounds ex-presidents and kept him on the front page for a year. There were illustrated features on big game in the Sunday supplements, and interviews with safari experts. It was the practice of some papers to head Roosevelt news with a list of "The Bag," and to add to it day by day

GENEALOGY OF HUMAN INTEREST STORIES

as more game was shot. McCutcheon's satirical but good-natured cartoons on the *Chicago Tribune's* front page reminded everyone that his favorite word was "Bully!" and the headlines told when he renounced it. All this kept an enchanting aspect of the Rough Rider before the public. It seemed almost inevitable that, on the day when the *New York Tribune's* correspondents in Egypt quoted him as saying he "wished he could give three cheers for everyone from California to Maine," there should be a beginning of "third-term talk."¹¹

Of course President Taft made page one during the twelve months, but he made it in connection with important controversies and problems of government. The man himself was submerged in dull, intricate impersonal issues. Roosevelt, the ex-president, made it because of the human interest in the romantic and dangerous incidents that marked the African interlude.

The news that is classified in the newspaper's departments, like the news of President Taft and his policies, bears on action which is related to some institution — a government agency, a baseball league or the stock market, for example. The organized interests of society enlist the attention of a special fraction of the readers on the basis of their continual, impersonal, technical and often professional concern. But the interest that is human engages the individual as a whole person, that is

to say, as a moral being with personal claims and obligations — and that means all the readers. The distinction lies in the difference between a rôle that is secular and one that is sacred, between an expression of opinion and an expression of feeling, between programs and persons. News that is in any sense practical and administrative issues from the former; human interest resides in the latter. Herein lay the wisdom of the copyreader who changed a headline from "The Financial Situation in Canada" to "Why It Is Easier to Get Rich in Canada Than in the United States," because, as he said, "the minute you become personal, you become interesting."

As the area of news expands — "Almost everything that interests any considerable group of people is news today — old furniture, bridge, fly-casting, the incidence of multiple births, and even the doings of tropical fish,"¹² — the possibilities for human interest stories grow, though many take more imagination to write than the Story of the Lost Child. Each type of story brings up to date an old theme that has interested readers in the past. But the themes are ultimately all alike: their appeal is not in the nature of the subject, but in the light they shed on private life. The fundamental element of human interest is a curiosity to know what it is like to undergo those common personal crises and visitations of good and bad luck, suffered by persons who are shown to have essentially one's own nature. In the end, human interest approaches the interest every man has in himself.

¹¹ The only thing that drove him off the front page was the Cook-North Pole controversy, and that, too, began in an adventure story. These statements are made on the basis of a study of the daily issues from March 1, 1909, to March 31, 1910, of the *New York Tribune* and *Chicago Tribune*.

¹² Stanley Walker, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

HUMAN INTEREST STORIES AND DEMOCRACY

By HELEN MACGILL HUGHES

Helen MacGill Hughes is an Assistant in Sociology at McGill University. After completing her academic work at the University of British Columbia and the University of Chicago she continued her studies of journalism at the Institut für Zeitungskunde in Berlin and spent the year 1931-32 in Germany. This article is, in substance, a chapter from a manuscript entitled *The Human Interest Story: A Study of Popular Literature*. It reflects the growing interest of students of public opinion in the sociological implications of newspaper trends.

Charles Merz, speculating on the state of the Union, once remarked that it is doubtful whether anything really unifies the country like its murders. Like so many outrageous and undocumented assertions, particularly the more cynical ones, this statement is probably the simple truth. He refers, of course, to murders as made public in the newspapers, and so, eventually, to something that Cooley has commented upon: that the press, by acquainting people with each others' lives, has implemented the democracy.¹ Like other liberals, Cooley looked upon the newspaper as an indispensable condition of government by the people. But, paradoxically, it is not the political news that informs people about one another. It is the revelations of private life and those inconsequential items that in the newspaper office are known as human interest stories. Now historians of the press maintain that it was this type of "copy" that, in America, made newspaper reading a universal habit. And so the question arises, Does the personal news which characterizes the popular newspaper play a part in welding the American democracy? The question is all the more pertinent because the forms of the totalitarian state which are threatening democratic structures are invariably opposed to this aspect of journalism.

From its beginning in the penny dailies of a century ago, the popular press has envisaged its reader as a plain man of brief schooling who, as Mencken says, "misses the hard words."² As soon as newspapermen recog-

¹ Cooley, C. H., *Social Organization* (New York: Scribner's, 1929), pp. 177-8.

² Mencken, H. L., *The American Language* (New York: Knopf, 1919), pp. 185-6. The common failure to understand abstract words is well exhibited in chapter 1 of Wembridge, E., *Life Among the Lowbrows* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1931).

"A song-writer," says Sigmund Spaeth, "would hardly dare to use *whom* in a sen-

nized that the great difference between the educated and others lies in vocabulary, they found it possible to tell substantially the same news in such a way that the uneducated comprehended and enjoyed it.

THE DEMOS AND HUMAN INTEREST

The conversion of news into stories told in the language of the street, but "written up" like fiction, brought new classes of readers, described by Whitelaw Reid as "men who can't read or at least had not been habitual and regular readers of the high-priced daily newspapers."³ Day and Bennett, editors of the first penny papers, the *New York Sun* and the *New York Herald*, referred to their readers of the 1830's as "artisans and mechanics," "the man of labor," and "the small merchant." The Yellow Press in the 'nineties delved into other new strata of readers when it enlisted women and immigrants, the former by love stories and department store advertisements, the latter by pictures and words of one syllable. All this time, and continuing into the present, cities were growing by draining population from the rural regions, so there have always been new recruits to be enrolled as metropolitan newspaper readers.⁴ For the first time these classes were brought imaginatively into the orbit of city and ultimately national life. For them the newspaper offers a view of a magical world. A working girl who read Hearst's *New York Evening Journal* once wrote:

It is very exciting to read of a girl who has disappeared from home, no one knowing where she has gone and in about three days a description of the girl will appear in the *Journal* and the way the detectives disguise themselves and go in search for this wayward girl. . . . Take for example the strange disappearance of Miss Dorothy Arnold, this is a case that I have followed up ever since I first saw its appearance in the *Journal* and I expect to follow it to its end. I am very anxious to know where Miss Arnold is and whether she has become the bride of Mr. George Griscom. The way I hope it will end is where she will return to her parents and they will welcome her with open heart and hands.⁵

To just such literate but unsophisticated city-dwellers—the demos⁶—the newspaper was a collection of stories. Reading matter like the *Journal's*

tence. . . . 'Who are you with tonight?' sounds both proper and provocative and the song could not possibly have achieved popularity with the burden of a 'whom' on its neck."—*The Facts of Life in Popular Song* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1935), p. 24.

³ "Recent Changes in the Press," *American and English Studies* (New York: Scribner's, 1913), Vol. 11, pp. 297-8. Reid was speaking of the year 1901.

⁴ *True Story Magazine* regards itself as the spokesman of country people, transplanted to the city. Promotion material depicts the reader as a woman who, in her home town knew all the neighbors, but who lives now in a small city flat and knows no one. *Vide* advertisement, *Chicago Tribune*, April 22, 1930.

⁵ Symposium on "The American Newspaper," *Collier's Weekly*, September 2, 1911, p. 22.

⁶ *Demos* is not an economic term like *proletariat*. Sumner divides the *classes*, who ini-

makes them readers and establishes the reading habit. To do so it must, it seems, have the character of a fairy tale. It transports the reader into another world, but, like the Negro folk-play, *Green Pastures*, it conceives the new world invariably in terms of the known. Sophisticated literature has at all times explored people and places that are unfamiliar and intriguing but there is always the familiar core of private sentiments, ambitions, and passions that humanizes even the bizarre and the outlandish. But *popular* literature, though it revolves about that small circle of personal vicissitudes, is realistic; the scenes of action hardly venture further than the reader's curiosity.⁷

The newspaper's stories reflected the popular mind, that is to say the way the demos thought about the things that came within its comprehension. Like the movies and *Saturday Evening Post* fiction they frequently turned out to be stories of young love and its trials.⁸ But within this range of experience known to the demos, the stories were the medium for presenting the unfamiliar and strange. For the human interest story invaded a succession of areas of life for its settings. To that extent the penny press and later the Yellow Press contributed to the education of simple-minded people in some of the facts of contemporary social life. In this the cheap press was joined by the dime novel, the story weekly and the confession magazine. The great growth of the popular newspaper in the last century accompanied the urbanization of the demos, whose burgeoning curiosity about the world was the beginning of sophistication. The interesting thing is that such a mission was far from the publisher's intention: it all came

tiate custom, from the *masses* who conserve it. (*Folkways*, Ginn, 1906, p. 45). Redfield distinguishes the tribal *folk* that sings folk-songs from the city *demos* that buys jazz songs (*Tepoztlan*, University of Chicago Press, 1930, p. 6). The American *demos* is not purely urban. Blumer describes the *mass*, referring to those of all classes who follow fashions, murder stories, land booms, etc., and so take part in mass behavior ("Molding of Mass Behavior Through the Motion Picture," *Publications of the American Sociological Society*, 1935, p. 116). In this discussion of popular literature the *demos* means the readers—at first artisans, then immigrants, then women—who find in the newspaper the enjoyment that others find in books.

⁷ A *True Story Magazine* advertisement, discussing the question: "How does a group of people first acquire its reading habit?" answers that it is through "simple stories, simply told, of people like the readers themselves; stories with the same problems that the readers themselves are constantly meeting."—Macfadden advertisement in the *New York Times*, December 3 and 18, 1935.

⁸ According to Colonel Joy of the Hays organization, "the best movie story concerns a man and a maid who are going some place, encounter difficulties, overcome them, and are rewarded."—Pew, M., "Shop Talk at Thirty," *Editor and Publisher*, March 12, 1932, p. 46.

about as an irrelevant and unforeseen effect of the compulsion put upon the reporter to provide attractive copy in order to sell the paper.

THE DEMOS AND CITY NEWS

Before the penny press, the newspapers confined their news to business and politics. Benjamin Day unconventionally hunted news in the police court. The *Sun's* intriguing accounts of vicious, violent, and uproarious life as it paraded before minor magistrates in the night sessions were, for thousands of obscure citizens, hitherto without a newspaper, the first impressions of the city to supplement their own direct experiences of sight and hearing. Day's discovery that mechanics and artisans could be readily interested in them is initially responsible for the fact that present-day trials have become public circuses and criminals public characters.

Day's competitor, James Gordon Bennett, was shrewd enough to appreciate the fact that the size of New York prevented the oral circulation of news that everyone would find worth telling if he knew of it, and he announced in his *Herald*:⁹

We shall give a correct picture of the world—in Wall Street—in the Exchange—in the Post Office—at the Theaters—in the Opera—in short, wherever human nature or real life best displays its freaks and vagaries.

The "collector of news" was employed to write up incidents of the city streets and tell New Yorkers about each other. The doings of the rich, for one thing, had become a subject of excited speculation among the poor. On this interest Bennett founded an important innovation, society news. He sent reporters to balls and banquets, printed a list of guests (designated tantalizingly by the first and last letters of their names) and told what they wore. Later on, Hearst reported fashionable functions on a heroic scale, giving as much as five pages to the Bradley-Martin masquerade, copiously illustrated by staff artists.¹⁰

Then there developed an interest in the contrary direction; the middle-class and the wealthy became curious about the poor. This was evinced in the vogue of slumming parties and of books like Jake Riis's *How the Other Half Lives*. Hearst's *Sunday Journal* ran illustrated sketches by Stephen Crane of his experiences in the Tenderloin. New York was dotted with little worlds like Chinatown, the Bowery, Little Italy, and other exotic neighborhoods which were a perpetual source of wonder for those on the

⁹ May 11, 1835.

¹⁰ An account of the repercussions of this publicity appears in Brown, H. C., *Brownstone Fronts and Saratoga Trunks* (New York: Dutton, 1935), pp. 330 ff.

outside.¹¹ A great volume of "feature stuff" brought the life of the immigrant and the poor into the newspaper. At this time, too, "Annie Laurie" (Winifred Black) was engaged to write accounts of women's lives and she produced features on such subjects as *The Strange Things Women Do For Love*, that were not police court news, but simply a commentary on the newer and freer careers that young women in particular were pursuing in the city. The shop girl who had inspired some of O. Henry's short stories, the business girl, and the "bachelor girl" began to exist for newspaper readers. For purposes of the newspaper the city became a laboratory for the concoction of stories.

These new departures were accompanied by a change in the balance of power in the editorial rooms, for when the newspaper office became the admitting ward for anything at all that the readers found interesting, local news, which the older papers had almost ignored, became actually more important than any other. Writing in 1879, Whitelaw Reid of the *Tribune* prophesied that city, national, and world news would be revalued in accordance with their relative interest for the reader, and that "the City Department may then cease to be the place where raw beginners wreak their will."¹² His astuteness as a prophet is acknowledged in a more modern pronouncement: "A dog fight in Champa Street is better than a war abroad."¹³ What was called the City Desk now represents the largest department in a newspaper's organization. "The trend unmistakably in New York," writes Stanley Walker, "is toward complete coverage. . . . The space devoted to local news in most New York papers has increased 50 per cent in the last fifteen years."¹⁴

Dog fights, lovesick girls and masked balls—"the interesting" rather than "the important," to use Hearst's distinction—provoke spontaneous comment and the newspaper did no more than make their area of diffusion wider. The knowledge of the city that it disseminated corresponded to what the readers found acceptable. And on this gossipy level the newspaper made

¹¹ Sightseeing bus conductors in New York have discovered that what middle-aged country visitors want is a version of the Bowery that was true forty years ago, but not true now. They hope to see the dives of the "sinful city" as the earlier legends in popular literature depicted it.—Berger, M., "O. Henry Returns to His Bagdad," *New York Times Magazine*, November 24, 1935.

¹² "Practical Issues in a Newspaper Office," *American and English Studies* (New York: Scribner's, 1913) Vol. II, p. 256.

¹³ Credited to Bonfils and Tammen of the *Denver Post*, whose office is on Champa Street.—Walker, S., *City Editor* (New York: Stokes, 1934), p. 87.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 45-6 and 52-6. Fifteen years ago a New York morning paper might have 40 local items; now it has 100, some illustrated.

a beginning of creating those conditions of close communication whose absence denies the city the social cohesion that the village possesses.

THE DEMOS AND WORLD NEWS

For sixty years the penny papers contented themselves with an orbit of news-coverage that surveyed with a fair measure of completeness, the small daily world of "the mechanic and the man of labor." The news the *Sun* enumerated in 1882 as causing temporary increases in circulation was of Presidential and civic elections, the last days of walking matches, great fires, and hangings in or near the city.¹⁵ It was Hearst who took his readers out of the State of New York and caused them to move imaginatively in a larger sphere.

A despatch was sent from Havana reporting that a seventeen-year-old Cuban girl, Evangelina Cisneros, was to be imprisoned for twenty years off the African coast for a political offense. Hearst seized upon it, exclaiming to his editor, Chamberlain, "We can make a national issue of this case. It will do more to open the eyes of the country to Spanish cruelty and oppression than a thousand editorials or political speeches." This unknown girl's misfortune, because of its human interest, caught the readers' imagination and it did become a national issue in a more profound sense than any prior question between the United States and Spain. The *Journal* launched a crusade to free her. Petitions with thousands of signatures, at first from such notable women as Julia Ward Howe and the widow of Jefferson Davis, and then from any woman who wanted to sign, were sent to the Pope and the Queen-Regent of Spain. The *Journal* gave more than two pages a day to the campaign, heading them: "The Whole Country Rising to the Rescue: More than Ten Thousand Women Petition for the Release of Miss Cisneros." As the *Journal's* readers saw it, the Cisneros case was one of monstrous persecution that any human being would naturally want to prevent. To their simple thinking the question of the invasion of Spanish jurisdiction did not exist. The diplomatic game has its own set of conventions; they are not those of plain people.

That a small local incident became public business was an unplanned effect of newspaper competition. Hearst had just bought the *New York Journal* and was trying desperately to seize for it the market of Pulitzer's *New York World*. During the Spanish-American War which soon followed, the two papers vied with each other not so much in reporting as in exploiting

¹⁵ O'Brien, F. M., *The Story of "The Sun"* (New York: Doran, 1918), pp. 324-5.

the news as a means to ensnare buyers. The streamer headline came into regular use for the first time. Its purpose was to force attention upon the inflammatory reports which soon earned them the name, the Yellow Press. To Pulitzer the war brought "an opportunity," as he put it, "to test the effect on circulation."¹⁶ To readers of the Yellow Press it appeared as a thrilling, but at the same time a simplified affair; complicated issues like the sugar market and the location of naval bases were not discussed—no one would enjoy reading that. The campaign was made personal and epic. The *Journal* referred to the Spanish commander of Cuba as "Butcher" Weyler. A private comment of the Spanish Ambassador was headlined "The Worst Insult to the United States in its History." The next day the withdrawal of the Ambassador was announced as "*Journal's* Letter Gets De Lome His Walking Papers."¹⁷ Later came the news: "Spain Refuses to Apologize." This went on for weeks until war was finally declared.

The diplomatic gestures were, of course, reported in all newspapers, but the Yellow Press construed events in terms of the recognizable and informal rules of a street fight. They indulged in the habit of making categorical moral distinctions and calling names that unsophisticated people—and others—fall into in trying to picture the relations between nation and nation.¹⁸ As Godkin of the sober *New York Post* complained, they treated the war like a prize-fight and begot "in hundreds of thousands of the class that enjoys prize-fights an eager desire to read about it." Famous editorial writer that he was, Godkin found it hard to believe that real political power—which, as Merriam has recently said, lies in a "definite common pattern of impulse"¹⁹—is exerted, not by the editorial but by interesting news. Whether there is truth or not in the legend that Hearst made it, this war at all events was wrested from the hands of diplomats. It became popular in the sense that the people entered into it enthusiastically and that they identified themselves wholly with it. The Yellow Press, by its jingo patriotism and its conversion of the news into dramatic concepts, led

¹⁶ Seitz, D., *Joseph Pulitzer: His Life and Letters* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1924), p. 238.

¹⁷ February 9, 1898.

¹⁸ "In sophisticated people participation (in a drama) may not be in the fate of the hero, but in the fate of the whole idea to which hero and villain are essential. . . . In popular representation the handles for identification are almost always marked. You know who the hero is at once. And no work promises to be easily popular where the marking is not definite and the choice clear, . . . a fact which bears heavily on the character of news."—Lippmann, W., *Public Opinion* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1922), pp. 162-3.

¹⁹ Merriam, C. E., *Political Power: Its Composition and Incidence* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1935), p. 7.

the attention of the demos from the local scene to the world of international relations. It also created *national* heroes and villains.

The popular newspaper continued the informal education of the demos into the formidable fields of business and science. Here again the familiar gave the entrée to the unknown and, because the commonest object of spontaneous interest is man himself, all copy tended to take the form of personal stories. Business news appeared in the guise of success stories. As expounded to him by politicians and soapbox haranguers, men of power and property are likely to strike the common man as predatory monsters called "The Milk Trust" or "The Traction Interests," and so, among the masses who have no business affairs of their own and no interest in the routine news of business and finance, any understanding there is of the difficulties, the temptations, and the triumphs of merchants and financiers will come from the reading of a personal revelation. For there the *man* is recognized and perhaps forgiven; the *magnate* is feared and hated, envied, or simply disregarded.²⁰

One of the best instances of a concentration of general attention on a technical matter occurred when the *New York Sun* put human interest into a report of the convention of the Sanitary Conference of American Republics. The news that Dr. C. W. Stiles had identified the hookworm as the mysterious destroyer of southern "white trash" was facetiously headed "Germ of Laziness Found?"²¹ The account below it was sober enough, but the reference to a universal human failing caught immediate attention and gave rise to innumerable jokes and cartoons. Yet the effect of the hubbub was, as Mark Sullivan put it, "to make Stiles the target for newspaper and stage humorists the world over; next, the object of scorn and vituperation in all the region south of the Potomac River and east of the Mississippi; and finally, years later, one of the heroes of medical science in his generation."²²

²⁰ Perceiving this, J. P. Morgan's advisers permitted wide circulation of a photograph, taken during the Senate hearing on munitions, that showed him talking with a circus midget who had climbed into his lap. The Senators wanted the picture destroyed.—*Vide Walker, op. cit.*, p. 106.

When the steel magnates of the country had a banquet years ago, a reporter put human interest into the news by reciting the menu of extravagant foreign dishes, followed by what each actually ate. One had a little gruel; another had prunes and milk; in short, all were elderly sick men, denied the plain man's luxury of enjoying a full meal.

²¹ December 5, 1902.

²² *Our Times: Pre-War America* (New York: Scribner's, 1930), Vol. III, p. 293.

MORAL WORLD OF THE DEMOS

All this time newspapermen were making the more obviously personal crises—elopements, murders, bereavements—the occasion for laying bare some obscure individual's inmost thoughts. The popular press enlivened *everything*. As its scope enlarged,²³ it led the demos through the human interest in a personal story toward an acquaintanceship with a simplified and trivialized, but none the less a wider world. The newspaper implemented this knowledge in perhaps the only possible way. Just what is the effect of this expansion of understanding which the newspaper expedites is a question newspapermen never ask, because it is beyond them. And social philosophers do not ask it because it is beneath them.

It is a matter of common observation that a "big story" in the newspapers becomes, as Northcliffe put it, the talking-point for the day. The Leopold-Loeb trial, one suspects, brought homosexuality into common conversation; the romance of King Edward and Mrs. Simpson animated the subject of morganatic marriage. And, as Merz said of murder, it gives the nation a set of facts on which to test its moral values.²⁴ Letters like these below are a symptom of general speculation:

Brooklyn: If any person went through a Hell on earth, that person was Mary Nolan. She has been treated cruelly and needs a helping hand. May she be successful in staging her comeback. She deserves all the success in the world.—Well Wisher.

Bronx: I have read with interest the story of Mary Nolan's life. From my experience as a social worker I have concluded that she is more sinned against than sinning. Why is it always made so difficult for a woman to stage a comeback? This "Mr. X" is probably living in security and respectability. Mary Nolan's only chance is to take the public into her confidence. When will the double standard of morality give the woman a fair chance? Through Mary Nolan's story, the *Mirror* has given society a great indictment.—Helen E. Martin, President Bronx Civic Study Club.²⁵

Moral speculations are not evoked by news of court procedure; they take form on the reading of an intimate story that shows what the impact of law and convention means as a private experience. A popular literature of true stories, by making the local and the remote world human, may be a substitute on an extended scale for those intimate encounters of direct per-

²³ This is reflected in a growth in staff. The first penny papers had an editor, police reporter, and local news collector. But the present Hearst papers nearly equal the coverage of standard dailies, using press franchises and a variety of reporters, correspondents, department editors, and columnists.

²⁴ *The Great American Bandwagon* (New York: John Day, 1928), p. 71.

²⁵ These appeared, following a completely commonplace and unexceptional news story, in Hearst's *New York Mirror* (a tabloid), November 25, 1933.

ception which are the basis of any understanding men have of each other. But this, in the end, puts the reader in the position of a confidant. The difference that intimacy makes in passing judgment is expressed in the aphorism: What's the Constitution between friends? It seems to be always the difference between impersonal news of the external facts and this popular literature that reveals the inner experience, that the *news* raises practical questions of ways and means with the appropriate code taken for granted, but *literature*, like all art, exhibits the inhumanity of doctrine, law, and custom. For literature does more than provoke a plea for exceptional treatment. It induces reverie about oneself and the remote, rather than the immediate objectives of one's own career, and it questions the traditional premises of social life.²⁶ And since the readers read the news as a pastime and rarely feel called upon to intervene, reverie is free to venture beyond the mores.

Such painful cogitation is the particular burden of uprooted people. Greenhorn immigrants, women entering a freer life, and recent arrivals from the country,²⁷ in becoming incorporated with the life that extends beyond the local community, are confronted with conflicting patterns of behavior and suffer miseries and uncertainties that are new and, it may seem, incurable. They experience cultural divergencies internally as private moral dilemmas. Indeed, in periods of rapid change, like the present, doubts assail all classes of people and become epidemic. "It is a chief use of social institutions," writes Cooley, "to make up our minds for us, and when in time of confusion they fail to do this, there is more mind-work than most of us are capable of."²⁸ True and contemporary analogues in the news are at once a comfort and a definition, for human interest stories dramatize for them the opposition between the "right," the legitimate, and the doctrinaire on the one hand, and the "human" on the other.²⁹ Their protests against the mores may be restated as an aspect of social change of which

²⁶ Blumer, H., *op. cit.*, pp. 115-27. Blumer holds the movies invoke reverie that is an attack on the mores, since it reaffirms the basic human values in a novel ("newsy") setting. This could be well taken to describe the human interest story.

²⁷ *True Story* promotion material, picturing the reader as a lonely newcomer to the city continues: "Do you wonder that these people turn to *True Story Magazine* for parallels of their own experience? For some yardstick to measure by in this changing order of a world that is never at rest?"—Advertisement in *Chicago Tribune*, April 22, 1930. The Voice of Experience, a radio counsellor on "Your Personal Problems," reports that the most popular of his ten-cent booklets is the one on the inferiority complex.

²⁸ *Life and the Student* (New York: Knopf, 1927), p. 219.

²⁹ The attitude of the tabloid *New York Daily News*, when a Democratic boss made his son a State Supreme Court Justice was: "What could be more natural than for a father to give his son the break?"—Walker, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

their own mobility is an expression. The vogue of confessional literature among the demos and of biography among sophisticates may signalize the dissolution of local culture and the emergence of a more inclusive consciousness.

One wonders whether a popular literature of true stories is not perhaps a phenomenon of change *in a free society*. The democratic state, as Hobhouse noted, rests more and more on the personality of its citizens. But under an oppressive and autocratic rule, like the totalitarian state, the citizen may not be his own moral judge. Nor is the press free to be interesting when dedicated to the service of the state. Dictators strive to make discipline absolute by contracting the sympathies and they are suspicious of human interest in newspapers because they fear the unconstrained speculation to which it gives rise.

SURVEYS

TECHNICAL RESEARCH

HADLEY CANTRIL, Editor

This section is devoted to a survey of current research in the field of public opinion. Studies in the formation, analysis, and measurement of public opinion will be included. Material is to be drawn from a wide variety of fields such as economics, history, sociology, politics, social psychology, journalism, advertising, market research, and radio broadcasting.

PUBLIC OPINION AND THE STUDY OF HISTORY

Students of American history have long been aware of the importance of propaganda as a factor in causation. Yet the emerging concern of social scientists with the whole field of public opinion and promotional activities has stimulated historians to undertake new investigations, a few of which may be selected for comment. The studies herein cited have been chosen partly because of the methods exemplified and the results achieved, and partly because they are fairly representative of the

type of work which historians are undertaking in this field.

Colonizing the New World.

The most important investigation in Anglo-American colonial history is without doubt that of Dr. Fulmer Mood. As a Guggenheim Fellow and a Fellow at the Huntington Library, Dr. Mood is making an exhaustive examination of the promotional literature of seventeenth century England, especially in relation to colonizing the New World. Dr. Mood demonstrates the importance of relating propaganda, for the investment of capital and for planting emi-

